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**DECISION MEMO**  
***Square Mountain Trail Reroute***  
**USDA Forest Service, Northern Region**  
**Nez Perce – Clearwater National Forests**  
**Salmon River Ranger District**  
***Idaho County, Idaho***

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**I. Decision**

I have decided to authorize the rerouting of approximately 1200 feet of trail on Square Mountain Spur Trail 384. A reroute of approximately 1800 feet will be dug at a reduced grade and tie into Trail 313 approximately 600 feet down the trail from its current location. This work will reduce grades on several steep, rutted portions of trail and rebuild sections of trail that have deteriorated beyond repair. The legal coordinates for the site are T26N, R4E, Section 9 SE ¼ (Boise Meridian).

**Background**

The Square Mountain Spur Trail 384 is a Class 2 Pack and Saddle Trail in the Gospel Hump Wilderness. It is approximately 1.4 miles in length and connects Hump Trail 313 to the Square Mountain trailhead. This trail is part of a popular hiking and horseback riding loop which offers a high elevation experience for day use visitors.

The project area is approximately 1200 feet of trail that is severely rutted from heavy stock use, poor location, and lack of drainage. This section of trail is creating a hazard to Forest visitors and damaging the resource.

The trail currently consists of two to four braided treads which are rutted up to 30 inches deep. Portions of this section of trail reach slopes of greater than 20 percent. Several large logs and rocks have been placed in the trail in an unsuccessful effort to slow the water running down the trail. These logs have not prevented severe erosion and have become a hazard.

**Implementation and Design Specifications**

All work will be accomplished using hand tools such as pick-mattocks, pulaskis, and shovels. A Montana Conservation Corps crew, working on Hump Trail 313 during July and August of 2014, will likely complete the project in August 2014. The duration of the project will be approximately four to six days. Agency personnel will be on site at all times in order to ensure that the reroute is completed to Forest Service Standards for a Class 2 Pack and Saddle Trail.

The reroute will be constructed at a grade of 12 to 15 percent, and incorporate grade reversals for drainage. The clearing limits will be established at 8 feet wide and 10 feet high, as measured from the center of the finished tread. It will be a full bench cut with a

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finished tread of 20 inches. The beginning and end of the reroute will have a standard Forest Service blaze installed on the downhill side of the trail at approximately eye level in order to guide users to the reroute.

The abandoned section of trail will have drainage installed, where possible. Log and rock check dams will be used to slow the waters flow and reduce further erosion. All compacted soil will be de-compacted with picks and allowed to re-vegetate naturally. Debris will be scattered in low to moderate densities in order reduce erosion and camouflage the disturbed ground. Both entrances to the abandoned portion will have large logs or rocks placed in an unobtrusive manner in order to discourage use. Natural re-vegetation will be monitored and aided with transplant or seed, if deemed necessary. The abandoned section will be monitored for noxious weeds for the following five years and any infestations will be treated with appropriate measures.

## II. Rationale for Decision and Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Decision

### A. Category of Exclusion and Rationale for Using the Category

Based on information in this document and the project record, I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances affecting resource conditions exist (36 CFR 220.6), that this project may be categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS, and that it meets all the criteria outlined for 36 CFR 220.6(e)(1)(i) *Constructing or reconstructing a trail to a scenic overlook....*

The rationale for my decision is based on: 1) the proposed action fully meeting the criteria for Categorical Exclusions, 2) the proposed action meeting the purpose and need, 3) the findings related to extraordinary circumstances, discussed below, 4) the project's consistency with laws and regulations, including the Forest Plan, 5) the on-the-ground review and discussion with resource specialists, and 6) my review of the Biological Assessments (BA), Biological Evaluations (BE), and specialists' reports.

### B. Finding of the Absence of Adverse Effects to Extraordinary Circumstances

#### 1. **Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat or Forest Service sensitive species:**

The Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) Botanist, and Wildlife and Fisheries Biologists determined the proposed action will have no effect or impact on listed or sensitive plant, wildlife or fish species or habitat, and suitable habitat will not be altered because habitat is not present in the project area, habitat is present but the species do not occur in the project area or habitat is present and the species may occur but the project will not affect the habitat for the species, and no incremental effects exist that will cause a cumulative effect, as documented in the Biological Assessments and Evaluations, and specialists' reports (see plant, wildlife, and fish sections of the project record); therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources. The Forest botanist did have the following comment, however:

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**Plants:** *The only species that has suitable habitat along the proposed trail reroute is Mendocino sphagnum, which may be found at boggy sites. There will be no impacts to this species because the trail routing will avoid such wet sites. Idaho douglasia has abundant suitable habitat in the general vicinity; however, there is none on the proposed trail route itself.*

**2. Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds:** The Forest Hydrologist made the following determinations with regard to this project:

Floodplains: *The Project will not modify or occupy floodplains to an extent greater than already exists. As such, there will be no adverse impacts to floodplains; thereby complying with EO 11988 and FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30.3.2.*

Wetlands: *The Project does not propose to modify or destroy wetlands. As such, the Project will not adversely affect wetlands; thereby complying with EO 11990 and FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30.3.2.*

Municipal Watersheds: *The Project area is not located within a municipal watershed. As such, the Project will not adversely affect municipal watersheds; thereby complying with FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30.3.2.*

*Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, and State Water Quality Laws: The proposed project is also consistent with all applicable State and Federal water quality laws because project Design Criteria and BMPs have been included to protect water resources.*

*No canopy cover will be removed; project area is on a ridge not near any water; drainage structures will be installed or improved to reduce erosion and sediment delivery; all side-cast from construction work will be stored outside of the RHCAs.*

**3. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas or national recreation areas:**

This project is located in the Gospel Hump Wilderness.

All proposed activities for this project will be managed according to the management direction of the appropriate wilderness legislation and of the Gospel Hump Wilderness Management Plan (USDA Forest Service 1985), thereby maintaining or enhancing wilderness conditions as directed in the Wilderness Act of 1964 (USDA Forest Service, p. II-2).

Additional direction provided by the Nez Perce Forest Plan includes the applicable Standard for Wilderness to ensure that practices used to manage wilderness indigenous plant and animal communities sustain natural processes with an emphasis on preserving endangered and threatened species, assuring that levels of human uses are compatible rather than detrimental, as required by the Wilderness Act (USDA Forest Service, p. II-18).

The trails in this project proposal in the Gospel Hump Wilderness have been determined as the minimum necessary to meet the minimum needs of visitor dispersal and administrative traffic while at the same time protecting plant and animal habitat. Trails in this project will be managed as a tool to protect the wilderness resource by managing the movement of people and stock, consistent with the above standard. Additionally, trail activities, such as this project, ensure public safety, and reduce resource damage,

consistent with the Forest Plan standard for trail facilities for the Gospel-Hump Wilderness (USDA Forest Service, p. III- 27).

Furthermore, completion of the proposed action will ensure these trails are maintained to provide reasonably safe passage, minimize erosion, and attain wilderness management objectives (including the Endangered American Wilderness Act of 1978), as directed in the Gospel-Hump Wilderness Management Plan (USDA Forest Service 1985, p. 26).

**4. Inventoried Roadless areas or potential wilderness areas:**

The project is not located within any Nez Perce National Forest Plan FEIS Appendix C Roadless Areas, Idaho Roadless Areas (36 CFR 294(c)) or potential Wilderness areas; therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.

**5. Research Natural Areas:**

The project area does not include land designated as Research Natural Areas; therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.

**6. American Indians and Alaska native religious or cultural sites and**

**7. Archaeological sites, or historical properties or areas:** The Forest Cultural Resource Specialist made the following determinations:

*An appropriate inventory has been conducted for the above project and cultural resources are known to be located within the area of potential effects. Concurrence from the Idaho SHPO is thus required, however, the Forest Cultural Resource Specialist has made a preliminary determination that the project will have no adverse effect on these properties because: [t]he project has been designed to avoid significant effects to components/features associated with listed, eligible or unevaluated cultural resource sites.*

**8. Soils:** The Forest Soils Scientist made the following determinations:

*Landslide prone areas are present but the trail design will utilize grade reversals and water-bars eliminating any significant impact on landslide prone areas. Abandoned sections of trail will be scarified, seeded, and covered in forest debris. Mitigation Measures required: Soil and Water BMPs will be used for any ground disturbing activities.*

**III. Interested and Affected Agencies, Organizations, and Persons Contacted**

On January 30, 2012, letters seeking public comments were mailed to individuals, organizations, a variety of state and local agencies, as well as the Nez Perce and Coeur d'Alene tribes. Project information has also been made available at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/nezperce> under NEPA projects. Three individuals/agencies responded during the public comment period but only one had specific concerns related to this project. The comments are incorporated into "Appendix A," attached hereto. We considered these comments, and determined no significant issues concerning extraordinary circumstances, use of the 36 CFR 220.6(e)(1) category or Forest Plan compliance were raised. All three letters are located in the project record.

**IV. Findings Required by Other Laws**

Based on my review of the actions associated with this project, I find that this project is consistent with applicable Federal laws and regulations.

**National Forest Management Act and Nez Perce National Forest Plan:** This action is consistent with the standards and guidelines contained in the 1987 Nez Perce National Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service 1987), as amended, as required by the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (see project record for further information) because minerals management goals, objectives, and standards are accomplished and protection of fish habitat is assured.

**Forest Plan Amendment 20 - PACFISH Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs):** All activities associated with the proposed action comply with direction regarding PACFISH because no effects to wildlife or fish species or habitat are anticipated. The project is consistent with the Forest Plan, including the PACFISH amendment which describes the Riparian Management Objectives (RMOS), and will have no effect on these RMOs, including pool frequency, water temperature, large woody debris, bank stability, lower bank angle or width-to-depth ratio because of the project location in relation to the stream channel and the nature of the disturbance.

**Endangered Species Act:** A Forest Service Fish Biologist, Wildlife Biologist, and Botanist evaluated the proposed action with regard to the Endangered Species Act as documented in the Biological Assessments, Biological Evaluations, and specialists' reports, and determined the Imperial Creek Placer Exploration project is consistent with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act because no effects to threatened and endangered species are anticipated.

**Clean Air Act:** This project will comply with the provisions of the Clean Air Act, and the rules, regulations, and permit procedures of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) because no effects to air quality are anticipated and no prescribed burning is planned.

**Clean Water Act and State Water Quality Laws:** The Interdisciplinary Team Hydrologist has determined that this project complies with the Clean Water Act, as amended, and state and Federal water quality laws, and will protect beneficial uses because project design criteria and BMPs have been included to protect water resources. No municipal water supplies are located within, adjacent or downstream of the project. Based on the implementation of project design measures and adherence to Idaho BMPs, this proposal will produce no measurable effects to water quality of area waters; therefore, it will have no impact to beneficial uses.

**National Historic Preservation Act:** The Forest Cultural Resource Specialist has determined:

*The project will have no adverse effect upon site 10IH2781 and thus no mitigation measures are required for the site because:*

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- *The 300 meters of new trail is being relocated immediately adjacent to 10IH2781 upon the same landform, and*
- *The reroute is only 300 meters of an otherwise 12-mile long trail.*

On March 19, 2014, Mary Anne Davis from the Idaho SHPO office concurred with these findings.

**Migratory Bird Treaty Act:** No substantial losses of migratory bird habitat are expected from the implementation of this proposal, nor any measurable impact on neotropical migratory bird populations as a whole. The proposed action will comply with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

The project complies with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director's Order 131 related to the applicability of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to Federal agencies and requirements for permits for "take." In addition, this project complies with Executive Order 13186 because the analysis meets agency obligations as defined under the January 16, 2001 Memorandum of Understanding between the Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designed to complement Executive Order 13186.

**Environmental Justice:** The proposed action will not disproportionately impact consumers, Native American Indians, women, low-income populations, other minorities or civil rights of any American Citizen in accordance with Executive Order 12898. No disproportionate impacts to minority or low-income populations were identified during the effects analysis.

**Prime Farm Land, Range Land, and Forest Land:** The proposed action complies with the Federal Regulations for prime land. The definition of "prime" forest land does not apply to lands within the National Forest system. The project area does not contain any prime range land or farm land. Federal lands will be managed with appropriate sensitivity to the effects on adjacent lands.

**Energy Requirements:** No unusual energy demands are required to implement the proposed action.

**Other Laws or Requirements:** The proposed action is consistent with all other Federal, state or local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment and cultural resources.

### V. Administrative Review and Appeal Opportunities, and Implementation Date

This decision is no longer subject to appeal pursuant to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit Court Order, filed March 7, 2014, in Case No. 12-16206 (DC No. 1:11-cv-00679-LJO-DLB). The project may be implemented during the timeframe specified above.

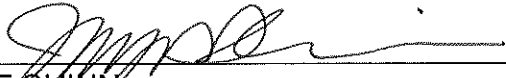
### VI. Contact Person

Questions regarding this decision should be sent to Linda S. Helm, c/o Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests, 104 Airport Road, Grangeville, Idaho 83530 or by telephone

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at (208) 935-4285 or facsimile transmittal at (208) 983-4099 during business hours (M-F, excluding Federal holidays, from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. PST).

**VII. Signature of Deciding Officer**

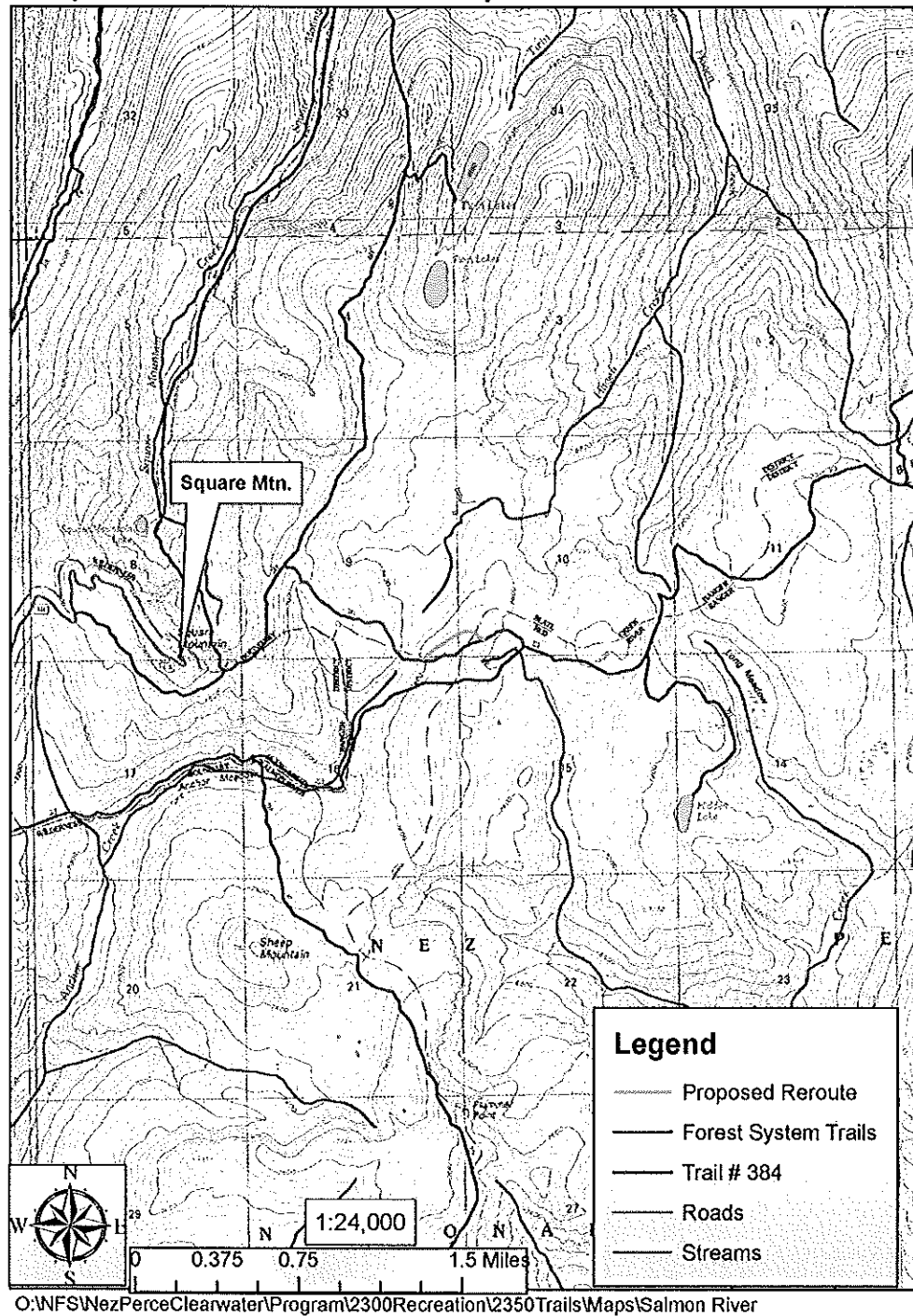
  
JEFF SHINN  
District Ranger  
Salmon River Ranger District

4/25/14  
Date

Enclosures: Map of Project Site; Appendix A

cc: Josh Lattin, Jeremy Harris

## Proposed Reroute on Square Mtn. Trail # 384





## Appendix A

### Response to Public Comments

On January 30, 2012, letters providing information and seeking public comment were mailed to over individuals, organizations, a variety of state and local agencies, and the Nez Perce and Coeur d'Alene tribes. Two letters were received regarding this project during the public comment period but only one had specific comments with regard to this particular project. Those comments and our responses are addressed in the following table.

Planning Participants' Comments and Forest Service Responses	
<p>Gary Macfarlane Friends of the Clearwater PO Box 9241 Moscow, ID 83843 --and-- Board Member, Alliance for the Wild Rockies Board Member, Wilderness Watch</p>	<p><b>Comment:</b> There are some questions we have about the project:</p> <p>1 -- How will different requirements, including mandates that trails and any trail work in wilderness be only the minimum necessary for the purpose of administering the area as wilderness, be met? Wilderness trails don't have management or engineering floors and are managed differently. Trails only receive work that is the minimum necessary. As such, engineering standards don't and shouldn't apply to wilderness.</p> <p>2 -- Who will do this trail relocation? Will it be done by Forest Service crews, contractors or volunteers? These questions are important because any program--no matter how good its intentions--that shifts work out of the public funded agency, where the employees work in the public interest, is a step toward privatization and special-interest control of the public lands which should be administered in the public interest by a publicly-accountable agency.</p> <p>These questions are important. A CE is inadequate to address impacts from massive trail relocation of this type in Wilderness.</p> <p>3 -- Finally, we are familiar with this section of trail. While it is a bit rough in places (which is expected for a wilderness trail), the need and/or amount of relocation work seems excessive. We will request a site visit with you in the field prior to making a decision.</p>

## Planning Participants' Comments and Forest Service Responses

### Our Responses:

1 – This project will remove a section of trail that is damaging the resource and presenting a hazard to members of the public. The work included in this project is consistent with management direction contained in the Gospel Hump Wilderness Management Plan. The Management Plan states that "Trails will be maintained or relocated to provide reasonably safe passage, minimize erosion, and attain Wilderness management objectives." The current condition of these trails is quickly falling away from the direction to provide safe passage and to minimize erosion. The project will be accomplished using the minimum tools needed. Specifically, we will use Pick-Mattocks, pulaskis, axes, rock bars, crosscut saws, loppers, and bow saws. These are all hand tools regularly used to maintain wilderness trails.

Trails within the wilderness still have National standards that apply to them. These standards are set in order to provide a safe experience for forest visitors and ensure that the trail does not unnecessarily damage the resource. The targeted grade and drainage requirements outlined in this project directly address safety and sustainability.

2 – This project may be accomplished by a Forest Service Trail Crew. However, it is possible that an opportunity to accomplish this project through a partnership between the Forest Service and an outside organization will arise. The District will make a decision that is in the best interest of the public in order to accomplish this project in a timely and efficient manner.

3 – The planning participant is welcome to request a site visit for this project.